

## 1 John: Go Deeper in Christ



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## How to use this resource for a group study

# How to use this resource for a group study

*This Bible study can be used for an individual or a group. If you intend to lead a group study, follow these simple suggestions.*



**1** Make enough copies of the Leader's Guides for everyone in the group.

**2** Don't feel that you have to use all the material in the study. Almost all of our studies have more information than you can get through in one session, so feel free to pick and choose the teaching information and questions that will meet the needs of your group. Use the teaching content of the study in any of these ways: for your own background and information; to read aloud (or summarize) to the group; for the group to read silently.

**3** Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting people to open up.

**4** When working through the questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for your group to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.

**5** Begin and end the session in prayer.

# Deep Joy

Leader's Guide

## Leader's Guide

# Deep Joy

*To know deep, lasting joy, we have to truly know Christ.*

*Sincere Christians universally want to “go deeper” in faith and knowledge of the Scripture. With this in mind, we wanted to create a Bible study that would be exegetically strong and focused on personal spiritual vitality.*

*For a variety of reasons, 1 John fits the bill. The subject matter is simple and straightforward: truth (right doctrine), obedience (right living), and love (right relationships). The cyclical structure of the book invites deeper reflection on these themes. And the letter's original purpose was to strengthen and assure new believers.*

*But spiritual depth isn't simply about knowledge (a common misconception), but about everyday life and relationships. And where better to begin than reflecting on how to have deeper joy in Christ?*

Scripture: 1 John 1:1–4

Based On: The sermon series “Living Deep” by Bryan Wilkerson



## Deep Joy

### Leader's Guide

## Part 1 Identify the Issue

**Note to Leader:** *Provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

If there's one thing that no one wants to be, it's "shallow." No one wants to live a superficial life. Deep is good, right? Friends want to have deep conversations. Philosophers want to think deep thoughts. Coaches want to have a deep bench. Fans want their teams to go deep into the playoffs. Investors are hoping for a deep recovery. Gardeners want their plants to have deep roots.

"Deep" implies substance. If something is deep, it's profound, it's sufficient, it's real, it's enduring. We want to be deep people. We want to live deep lives.

The Book of 1 John is actually a letter from the apostle John to a community of believers, probably in Ephesus. It's a simple book. He doesn't cover a wide range of topics. Instead, John chooses to focus on a few simple truths and drill down into them.

We get the gist of John's message in a couple of verses from 2:24–25, especially as they appear in *The Message* translation: "Stay with what you heard from the beginning, the original message. Let it sink into your life. If what you heard from the beginning lives deeply in you, you will live deeply in both Son and Father."

So with that goal in mind, let's dig into John's letter. Read 1 John 1:1–4.

### Discussion Questions:

**[Q]** What do the first three verses of 1 John tell you about the rest of the book?

**[Q]** How does this make our joy complete (v. 4)?

**[Q]** What does that tell you about joy?

## Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching Point One: Jesus Christ really lived.

The first thing John wants to tell us is that Jesus Christ really lived. John was writing at a very precarious time in the life of the early church. This letter was written late in the 1st century (probably between 70–90 AD), so it's been about 50 years since Jesus of Nazareth walked the earth. The first generation of believers, those who actually encountered Jesus, have just about died off. John was one of the last living apostles. So he's writing to Christians who never personally

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encountered Jesus of Nazareth but heard about him from someone who did (or those who heard about Jesus from someone who heard about Jesus from someone who actually met Jesus—you get the idea). As time went by, things got a little ragged. Questions come up. Doubts creep in: Did it really happen? Is it really true?

Well, John is writing to people with those questions. They weren't there when Jesus lived and taught and died. They're going on hearsay. Not only that, but enough time had passed that people were beginning to mess with the message. Some were questioning the humanity of Jesus. Others were questioning the divinity of Jesus. A particular strain of false teaching going around was that Christ wasn't really human. He just *appeared* to be human. He *appeared* to have a body. He *appeared* to die.

So John writes to these believers at this precarious time in the life of the church to set the record straight. Jesus Christ really lived. We saw him, he writes. By “we” he means not only himself, but any other apostles and first generation believers who might still have been alive. We saw him heal the sick and multiply the loaves and fishes and calm the storm at sea and raise Lazarus from the dead. We heard him say, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” and, “I and the Father are one.” We even touched him, he writes. Maybe he's remembering how he leaned up against Jesus at the last supper.

**[Q]** Are you a first generation Christian (your parents were not Christ-followers), a second generation Christian (your parents were committed believers), or a third generation believer (both your parents and grandparents were Christ-followers)?

**[Q]** What is something good about being a second or third generation believer?

**[Q]** What can be the problem in being a second or third generation believer?

**[Q]** What kind of doubts and questions have you had or still have about Christ?

**[Q]** What kind of evidence convinces you that what you know of Christ is true and helps you stay faithful to him?

**Leader's Note:** *We don't have time for a lengthy discussion of the historicity of Jesus in this study, but it's good to note that we have compelling evidence. We have four eyewitness accounts of his life and death and resurrection, each written from a distinctive point of view, yet all telling the same story. We have more manuscript evidence for Jesus than we do for any other figure of antiquity. And in addition to Scripture, we have several remarkable non-biblical references to the life of Jesus Christ—the Jewish historian, Josephus; the Roman historians, Tacitus and Suetonius; and Pliny the Elder. We also have the worldwide movement that bears his name—Christianity—one of the most dominant and widely believed faiths on the planet.*

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**Optional Activity:** Go to [LeeStrobel.com](http://LeeStrobel.com) and choose one of the videos on his site that addresses evidence for Christ and Christianity. Watch it as a group and discuss the evidence presented.

### Teaching Point Two: John and the apostles personally experienced Jesus Christ.

The second thing John wants to tell us is that he and those with him really experienced Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't just live, John tells us, but he also changed their lives.

We need a quick grammar lesson to appreciate what John is saying here. Notice that John doesn't simply say "we saw Jesus and heard Jesus and touched Jesus." That would have been the simple past tense—reporting a past action. What he says is, "We have seen . . . we have heard . . . we have touched." He uses what's called the perfect tense, which describes past action with continuing results. He's not just reporting that something happened in the past. He's reporting something that happened that continues to have an effect right up to the time of writing.

An example: If someone says to you, "I saw the Grand Canyon," all they're telling you is that at some point in the past they made visual contact with it. That's the past tense. If someone says to you, "I have seen the Grand Canyon," that's the perfect tense. They're telling you that they not only saw it, but that the seeing of it has made a lasting impression on them and they'll never forget it. They've been changed by the experience.

That's what John is saying here. We didn't just see Jesus and hear Jesus and touch Jesus. We experienced Jesus, and the experience of seeing, hearing, and touching Jesus continues to shape our lives. His words are still ringing in our ears. His works are still vivid in our minds' eye. Our nerve endings still tingle at the sense of his presence.

**[Q]** In fact, John says twice that the experience is so real that Jesus has become our life. How does he say it in verse 1? How about verse 2?

**[Q]** How is Jesus Christ your life? In other words, how has he changed you and given you purpose?

**[Q]** Let's explore this idea further. How do you see his handiwork in:

- nature?
- people's transformed lives?
- hearing his voice through Scripture?
- convicting you of sin?

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**[Q]** John wrote this letter for people who called themselves Christians but for a variety of reasons weren't experiencing the fullness of life. Is that true of you? Explain.

### Teaching Point Three: You can personally experience Jesus Christ too.

Look again at verse 3. The word, *fellowship*, or *koinonia* in the Greek, means “to share, or to have something in common.” It's not enough for John to be experiencing this life himself; he wants others to share the experience with him. In fact, he wants it so badly that his own experience is incomplete without them.

**[Q]** Look at verse 4. That's a very interesting statement. If he had said, “We write this to make *your* joy complete,” that would make sense. Why does he say “our” instead of “your”?

**[Q]** Give an example of when you found something so joyous that you had to share it with others.

**[Q]** Christian experience is incomplete until we've shared it with others. How can “going deeper” become self-centered or even self-indulgent if we don't share it?

**[Q]** Have you ever had the privilege of leading someone to Christ or mentoring them? If so, tell us about it.

**[Q]** If you haven't been confident in helping others know Christ, either initially or more deeply, what is holding you back?

## Part 3 Apply Your Findings

So John's first lesson is this: You know you're living deep when your greatest joy is experiencing Christ personally and sharing that experience with others. That's why our vision shouldn't be to just to go deeper in Christ, but also to get closer to those who know Christ, and to reach wider so others can come to know him.

**Action Point:** On your own this week read the entire book of 1 John. Jot down the things that stick out most to you and share them with someone else who you think needs to hear it.

—Study by Bryan Wilkerson, with JoHannah Reardon

## Deep Walk

Leader's Guide

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*We were made to live substantive lives in Jesus Christ.*

*How do you know if someone's a real Christian? Is it the amount of time spent serving in the community or the Bible on the desk? Is it that they don't use bad words or that they go to church a lot? The problem is, lots of people don't swear, help in the community, or go to church. Are they all Christians? How do you know if you are a Christian?*

Scripture: 1 John 1:5–7; 2:3–6; 3:7–10

Based On: The sermon series "Living Deep" by Bryan Wilkerson





## Deep Walk

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## Part 1 Identify the Issue

**Note to Leader:** *Provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

We often say that a real Christian is someone who has accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior. That sounds pretty definitive, but is that all it takes—praying a prayer or raising your hand in church? I heard about a t-shirt that says, “And they’ll know we are Christians by our t-shirts.” Three out of four Americans describe themselves as Christians. How do you know if you are a true Christian?

In his letter, John proposes three tests that reveal whether or not a person truly is a Christian. There’s the doctrinal test (What do you believe?), the ethical test (How do you live?), and the relational test (Who do you love?).

The entire letter is organized around these three tests.

### Discussion Questions:

**[Q]** What are the marks of a Christian?

**[Q]** What makes you think *you* are a Christian?

**[Q]** Of the three tests (what you believe, how you live, who you love), which are the easiest to outwardly see? The hardest?

## Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching Point One: God is light.

Everybody has a slightly different idea of what it means to go deeper. To some people it means deeper knowledge of the Bible, so they’re looking for meaty studies with lots of Greek words and cross references. To others it means deeper experiences with Christ. They’re looking for greater intimacy with God and fullness of the Holy Spirit and hoping for chills to run up and down their spine in worship. And to others it means going deeper in our practice of the spiritual disciplines—more prayer, more reflection, more fasting. They want more spiritual experiences and soul care. Deeper knowledge. Deeper intimacy. Deeper practice. Real Christians are serious about these.

But John doesn’t start with any of these. The first thing John says is, “You wanna go deeper? Then stop sinning.” That’s not exactly what we were hoping to hear, is it? At least not right

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away. There's nothing new and exciting about "not sinning." But that's where he begins. If you call yourself a Christian, John says, then start living like one.

So the first topic, or test, that John introduces is the ethical test: How do you live? Let's follow John's reasoning as he takes us deeper in our understanding of what it means to be a real Christian. Read 1 John 1:5–7.

**[Q]** Why does John use "light" as a metaphor for God (v. 5), and what does that have to do with the way we live?

**Leader's Note:** *John reminds his readers that light isn't just about knowledge; it's about conduct. God isn't light because he's spiritual. He's light because he's holy, and his people should be, too, if they want to go deeper.*

**[Q]** Look at verse 6: What does the phrase "do not live by the truth" mean?

**Leader's Note:** *This could literally be translated, "do not do the truth." We think of truth as something we know. John tells us that truth is something we do. For example, if it's true that wearing seat belts save lives, it's not enough simply to know that truth; you have to do truth—you have to buckle your seat belt. According to John, real Christians don't just believe their faith, they do their faith.*

**[Q]** What does verse 7 tell us about what it means to walk in the light?

**Optional Activity:** To illustrate what it means to live without light, turn off all the lights in the room and close the shades or drapes to block out as much light as possible. While it is dark in the room, ask: How would it affect your life to live in the dark all the time? How could that translate into how you live your Christian life? How does this exercise help you better understand this passage?

### Teaching Point Two: Walk as Jesus walked.

Read 1 John 2:3–6.

Notice how John uses words like "know" and "truth"—words that we associate with going deeper—and turns them into behaviors. If you want to know if somebody's a real Christian, John says, don't just ask them what they believe, look at how they live. In fact, John says, if someone claims to be a Christian, but they don't do what Christ says, they're a liar.

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Liar? That's pretty harsh! But that's how serious John is about obeying God's commands.

Unfortunately, a lot of contemporary Christians are not making that connection. A disturbing Barna poll compared the behavior of so-called "born-again Christians" with the rest of the population. These were people who said they had accepted Christ as their Savior and believed the Bible was God's Word. That survey found that in a 30-day period, these self-identified Christians were nearly as likely as anyone else to visit a pornographic website, to take something that didn't belong to them, to physically fight or abuse someone, to drink too much, to use an illegal drug, to have said something that wasn't true, to have gotten back at someone for something they did, and to have said mean things behind someone's back. Clearly there is a gap between the belief and behavior of many people who call themselves "Christians."

**[Q]** Look at verse 6. What does it mean to walk as Jesus walked—how do we do that?

**[Q]** Let's explore this idea further by brainstorming what it would mean to walk as Jesus walked in our different roles in life. What would it mean for:

- a truck driver
- a middle manager
- a parent
- a journalist
- a salesman

### Teaching Point Three: Do what's right.

Once again John leaves the subject of lifestyle, and then comes back to it again later with a vengeance! Let's follow John as he drills down a third time and then try to pull it all together. Read 1 John 3:7–10.

John is drawing some pretty stark lines in this letter. You're either in the light, or you're in the dark. You're either living the truth or living a lie. You're either a child of God or a child of Satan. And at least one of the tests, John says, is ethical; it's how you live each day.

**[Q]** How does the fact that the one "who does what is right is righteous" (v. 7) fit in with the fact that we are saved by grace and not works (Eph. 2:8–9)?

**[Q]** John isn't saying that a real Christian never sins. He says he cannot go on sinning. Can you give an example of the difference?

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**Leader's Note:** *He's talking about habitual behavior, not occasional lapses. But he is expecting progress. As we go on with God, as we go deeper in our faith, it will show up not only in our belief, but also in our behavior. We won't just bask in his presence in morning devotions; we'll do the right thing at work that afternoon.*

**Optional Activity:** Try a simple drawing to diagram a person's spiritual journey. Draw a horizontal line across the page. On one end write, "No God." A person on this end has no faith at all. On the other end we might write, "Know God." This person has a fully-formed faith and a personal relationship with God. We imagine a person making progress along this line, moving from one end to the other. At a certain point they come to believe in God, maybe, but they're still not sure about Jesus. Eventually they come to a decision point, here in the center, and they accept Christ as their Savior and Lord. We sometimes call that "crossing the line." At that point, we generally consider that person a Christian. But they still have a long way to go, don't they? They have a lot to learn about God and his ways. So they continue to grow in their faith—studying the Bible, worshiping every Sunday, etc. It's primarily a doctrinal journey. When we talk about "going deeper," we're usually thinking of moving along this continuum, toward knowing God.

But according to John, we have to draw another line, this one going up and down. If the horizontal line is the doctrinal axis, then this vertical one is the ethical axis. At the bottom put the word "Sinful," and at the top put the word "Holy." A person at the bottom of the line continuously breaks God's laws and does whatever he or she chooses. A person at the top of the line is fully conformed to the image of Christ. In the same way a person needs to travel across the doctrinal axis—growing in her knowledge of God and his Word—she also need to be traveling up the ethical axis—becoming more like Christ in her character and conduct.

Now, according to John's way of thinking, where on that grid would you find a real Christian? Here, in the upper right quadrant, right? They've come to believe in Christ as Savior and Lord, and they have begun to resemble Christ in their character and conduct. Where would you certainly find a non-Christian on this grid? Down here, in the lower left quadrant, right? Neither their belief nor their behavior gives any indication they are Christians. But now what would you say about people in these other two quadrants? Is a person a real Christian if they live like a Christian is supposed to live, but haven't accepted Christ as Savior? We would probably say no, or at least put a question mark. How about a person who claims to believe in Christ, but his behavior gives no indication that he is actually following Christ? If we're going to be consistent, we probably need to put a question mark in that case, too.

According to John, a real Christian is located somewhere in this quadrant. It doesn't matter where in the quadrant, exactly. What's more important than where they are is the direction

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they are moving in. Real Christians are moving up and to the right. Going deeper doesn't just mean knowing more about Christ; it's becoming more like Christ.

A couple of cautions about this diagram: First, only God knows where a person is on this grid. You cannot capture the mystery of salvation through a simple drawing. Only God knows when a person crosses the line of belief or behavior. It may not always be evident to us. Second, this test is meant to be used to evaluate yourself, not others. John didn't write this letter so his readers could point fingers and pass judgment on others. He wrote it so they would know whether or not they were really a Christian, and how they could experience a deeper walk with Christ. And that's John's big idea for this week: You know you're living deep when your belief and your behavior are taking you closer to Christ.

### Part 3 Apply Your Findings

Have you crossed the line and come to believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? Are you moving upward on this ethical axis, becoming more like Christ every day? What steps might the Lord want you to take that will get you moving up toward the deep walk and abundant life God has in mind for you?

**Action Point:** On your own this week, think about the above questions and then talk to God about them. He desires to show you your heart and then to change it. Ask him sincerely to do so.

—Study by Bryan Wilkerson, with JoHannah Reardon

## Deep Clean

Leader's Guide

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# Deep Clean



*Our sin is real, but our God willingly forgives.*

*You don't hear the word sin much these days. We're more comfortable with words like dysfunction, disease, mistakes, even failures. In fact, a few years ago, the Oxford Junior Dictionary actually removed the word sin from its contents. They explained that it had fallen into disuse and was no longer relevant to younger generations.*

*We want to live deeper in Christ, but something happens. We slip backward. We fall down. We sin. What does that say about us as Christians? What do we do about it?*

Scripture: 1 John 1:8–2:2

Based On: The sermon series "Living Deep" by Bryan Wilkerson

# Deep Walk

## Leader's Guide

### Part 1 Identify the Issue

**Note to Leader:** Provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Some years ago a Harvard psychiatrist wrote a provocative book entitled *Whatever Became of Sin?* In it he expressed his fear that *sin* was disappearing from our moral vocabulary—not just the word, but the very concept of a universal standard of wrongdoing. He bemoaned the declining sense of morality in our culture and people's reluctance to take responsibility for their behavior. He was concerned for the impact it might have on our society and on people's physical and emotional well-being. He wrote that book in 1973, and I think we'd all agree that his fears have become a reality.

When the church abandons the notion of sin, something has gone wrong with our message. We can never live deeply until we deal with our sin.

#### Discussion Questions:

**[Q]** When was the last time you read an article or heard a sermon on sin? What do you remember from it?

**[Q]** How does the word *sin* communicate something different than words like *dysfunction*, *disease*, *mistakes*, and *failures*?

**[Q]** What kind of words do you use to label things you do wrong? Why?

### Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

#### Teaching Point One: We are sinful by nature and choice.

Read 1 John 1:8–10.

In these verses, John confronts two mistaken ideas people tend to have about sin—in his own day as well as in ours. The first mistaken idea is that sin is not a problem. Look again at verse 8: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” A more literal translation would be, “If we say we have no sin . . .” That expression, to “have sin,” is an unusual one, which is probably why the translators tried to improve it a bit. John is the only biblical writer to use that exact expression. He's describing sin as a condition rather than an act. To say that we “have sin” is to say that we have a moral problem, an underlying principle at work in our beings, a disposition toward disobedience. It's not just that we do wrong things; it's that there's something wrong with us, in us.

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The second mistaken idea people have about sin is this: sin is not a problem for me. In other words, other human beings may have a problem with sin, but I don't. I've gotten beyond it. Look at verse 10: "If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives." Here John is not talking about sin as a condition, but sin as an action, a behavior. Apparently there were some teachers and believers in the church who claimed they had achieved a level of spirituality in which they no longer succumbed to sin.

John refutes both lines of thinking. If we think human beings don't have a sin problem, we're deluding ourselves. And if we claim that we haven't sinned, we're making God out to be a liar. That's pretty strong language. But John knows we can never live deeply until we face the reality of sin.

The reality is we are sinners by nature and by choice. In other words, we have a disposition toward sin *and* we commit sins. John is not the only biblical writer to make the point.

**[Q]** Read Psalm 51:3–5 and Romans 3:22–23. How do both of these passages make clear that we not only have sinful actions but sinful natures?

**[Q]** How is having a sinful nature different than saying that human beings are evil through and through or that they never get it right?

**Leader's Note:** *The Bible is clear that human beings are created in God's image; our very nature is designed to reflect his goodness, love, justice, and beauty. And sometimes, often times, we do get it right. It's just that ever since the fall of the first man and woman, human beings have this skew in our nature away from God and his goodness—this disposition to do the wrong thing, to hurt people that we love, and to trash what God meant to be beautiful. Our very nature is shot through with these tendencies.*

### Teaching Point Two: We must get rid of our sin.

So what do we do with our sin? We've got a few options. We could ignore it. We could try not to think about it and make excuses for it. None of us would claim to deny sin, but practically speaking, we choose to ignore it—we minimize it, rationalize it, and learn to live with it. It's really just a cover-up, like John says. We don't want to admit to ourselves and God that we have a problem.

Another option is to obsess over it—to punish ourselves for it, to beat ourselves up over it, to wallow in guilt, shame, and regret. The problem with obsessing is that it only serves to drive us deeper into our sin and further from God, others, and our true selves.



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**[Q]** Which of these two things do you tend toward—ignoring sin or obsessing over it?

**[Q]** Neither one removes the guilt, and neither one restores us to relationship with God and others. What does remove sin and restore us according to 1 John 1:9?

**[Q]** Why is confession so hard for us?

### Teaching Point Three: If we confess, God forgives and cleanses us.

As important and helpful as it is to confess to other human beings, ultimately each of us has to confess our sins to God. He is the primary one we have offended, and he is the only one who can do something about it.

**[Q]** John says that if we confess our sins, God will do two things (v. 9). What are they?

**Leader's Note:** *First, he will forgive us. To forgive someone is to release them from their debt and obligation. When someone forgives a loan, it means you no longer need to make payments on that loan. When God forgives you for your sin, it means you no longer need to pay for that sin. You don't need to punish yourself. You don't need to do penance. You're off the hook. The second thing God will do is cleanse us: "and to purify us from all unrighteousness." That word purify could just as easily be translated cleanse. To purify something is to remove what doesn't belong there. To cleanse something is to get rid of the dirt.*

**[Q]** Forgiveness releases us from guilt. Cleansing removes our shame. Forgiveness takes care of our past. Cleansing makes possible our future. Why are both necessary for us to go deeper in the Christian life?

**[Q]** Read 1 John 2:1–2. How do these verses explain how God can both forgive and cleanse us and still be a just God?

**Leader's Note:** *God can forgive our sin because Jesus paid for it by his death on the cross. God can cleanse our sin, because the blood of Jesus washes it away—no matter how deep the stain.*

**Optional Activity:** You will need index cards or sticky notes, a fireplace, fire pit, or fireproof metal bowl, matches or a lighter. Read the following:

Christ died for us while we were still sinners, before we even knew that we needed forgiveness. But we experience the deep sweetness of God's forgiveness when we confess our sins and when we forgive others.

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“Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).

After reading, give each person a couple of index cards or sticky notes. Let group members write a specific sin they have not confessed to God, or one for which they have trouble accepting God's forgiveness. (Members do not have to share what they write—it can be between them and God—unless they want to share). Then have each person write down a sentence or two describing a situation where they need to forgive or have forgiven someone. Take turns placing the papers in the fireproof bowl or fireplace/fire pit and burn them. (As an alternative to burning the papers, simply shred them.) As they burn, pray this line from the Lord's Prayer: “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Then read this verse aloud together: “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more” (Isaiah 43:25).

## Part 3 Apply Your Findings

“My dear children,” says John, “I write this to you so that you will not sin.” John wants us to understand the deep damage that sin does to our souls and to our relationships. But he also wants us to know that if and when we do sin, we have a Father to turn to who can forgive us and set us free. Praise God for being faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, when we confess our sins to him.

**Action Point:** On your own this week consider if there is any sin that is keeping you from going deeper in Christ. If there is, go to your pastor, small-group leader, or close friend and confess it. Ask them to pray with you so that you can begin to move ahead.

—Study by Bryan Wilkerson, with JoHannah Reardon

## Deep Desire

Leader's Guide

### Leader's Guide

# Deep Desire



*Let Christ fill your hunger.*

*Christians have always had a love/hate relationship with the world. On one hand, the most famous verse in the Bible tells us that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son." If God loves the world that much, it seems like we should, too. But then you come to a passage like this, where John warns us not to love the world or anything in the world. So which is it—love or hate? Are we to forsake all worldly pleasures?*

Scripture: [1 John 2:12–17](#)

Based On: [The sermon series "Living Deep" by Bryan Wilkerson](#)

# Deep Desire

Leader's Guide

## Part 1 Identify the Issue

**Note to Leader:** *Provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

Traditionally, many Christian churches and colleges have enforced a negative view of the world. Certain activities were not permitted—no tobacco, no alcohol, no social dancing. These were considered worldly forms of entertainment. If you were raised in this kind of environment, you may wonder if you're missing something. Have you wondered if you're really prepared to forsake all those "worldly pleasures" for the rest of your life? If you love God do you have to hate everything else?

### Discussion Questions:

**[Q]** If you were raised in church, what did your church teach about worldly pleasures?

**[Q]** For those of you that were raised with a lot of rules about what you can't do, did you ever rebel against those rules? And if you did, why?

**[Q]** We all need rules to function, but what might be the problem with rules we don't understand?

**[Q]** It has been said that rules without relationship never work. Has that been true in your experience? Explain.

## Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

**Teaching Point One: No matter where we are in our spiritual journey, we can move forward.**

Read 1 John 2:12–14.

The three groups—children, fathers, and young men—most likely refer to three spiritual stages represented by John's readers. Some are new believers, still rejoicing in their forgiveness. Some are seasoned believers, mature in their knowledge of God. And others are just hitting their stride as followers of Christ, full of zeal and strength. Wherever they might be in their journeys, he doesn't want them to get discouraged by his challenging words, and he wants them to understand that he has their best interests at heart.

**[Q]** Why is it important to recognize where we are in our spiritual journey?

**[Q]** Which stage are you in—new believer, seasoned believer, just hitting your stride?

## Deep Desire

### Leader's Guide

**[Q]** Name all the positive things mentioned in this passage. Which ones encourage you most?

### Teaching Point Two: Do not love the world or anything in the world.

Read 1 John 2:15–17.

This is a stern warning. It's one of the relatively few times in the letter John uses the imperative mood, as if giving a command. Just to help you appreciate the significance of that: the Book of James, which is also five chapters long, uses the imperative mood 35 times to give a command or a prohibition. John only does that 15 times, and this is one of them. "Do not love the world." That's how serious he is.

**[Q]** What exactly does John mean by "the world?"

**[Q]** What about "anything in the world"?

**Leader's Note:** *He's using the Greek word, kosmos, here, which generally has one of two meanings in the New Testament. Sometimes it refers to the created world—that is, the earth itself and its inhabitants, human beings. The Bible is clear that the created world is good; in fact, God pronounced it "very good" when he was done creating it. And as we said, it's clear from the Bible that God loves the world and sent his Son to save the world. So when he says here, "Do not love the world or anything in the world," he's not referring to the earth itself or to the human race. Sometimes that word kosmos is used to describe the sinful world—that is, the earthly system of values, beliefs, and behaviors that are in opposition to God and his purposes. John uses the word this way two other times in this letter (4:3; 5:19).*

**[Q]** How do you know if you love the world?

**[Q]** You can't love the world and God at the same time. It's like trying to have one foot in a canoe and one foot on the dock. Eventually you have to throw yourself in one direction or the other. When have you tried to do keep one foot in and one foot out, and what was the result?

### Teaching Point Three: The desires to do, to have, and to be can be destructive.

There are a variety of ways to translate verse 16. John identifies three worldly desires that are characteristic of a worldly way of life. One explanation is: the desires to do, to have, and to be.

## Deep Desire

### Leader's Guide

The first is the desire to do, “the lust of the flesh.” The word *lust* actually applies to all three desires. In the Greek language, *lust* is a compound word which takes the normal word for desire and puts a prefix on it that intensifies it. Literally, it could be translated “hyper-desire.” Lust begins with a healthy desire but takes it to an unhealthy extreme.

Remember, there’s nothing wrong with desire. Most desires are God-given. The desire to eat, to drink, to work, to play, to build, to procreate, to achieve, to conquer—these desires are all natural to human beings. What the world does is take these natural desires and pervert them, corrupt them, or exaggerate them, so that they become unnatural and sub-human.

The world takes these desires and twists them into something they were never meant to be. There’s nothing wrong with food, until we eat too much of it. There’s nothing wrong with a drink (liquor or coffee!), until it alters our behavior, or until we can’t live without it. There’s nothing wrong with skiing, until it crowds God right out of your life. There’s nothing wrong with a kiss on the lips, as long as the person you’re kissing is rightfully yours to kiss.

**[Q]** What kind of destruction does the pursuit of pleasure bring over time in our lives? Can you give an example?

**[Q]** How does such a pursuit eclipse our love for the Father?

The second worldly desire John identifies is the desire to have, “the lust of the eyes.” This desire is not directed toward sensation and experience, but toward material objects—things the world tells us we have to have. It’s the desire for possessions.

There’s nothing wrong with material things, whether it’s clothes or houses or toys or tools—if God should provide the resources for them. The Bible never condemns anyone for desiring things or having things. We meet plenty of wealthy, godly people in Scripture, and Jesus had plenty of wealthy friends and acquaintances.

**[Q]** What causes us to cross the line that makes a particular thing we want to acquire destructive instead of productive to us?

**[Q]** How can such a desire become more important than God to us?

The third worldly desire is the desire to have, “the pride of life.” This is the pursuit of success, achievement, and recognition (pride).

**[Q]** There’s nothing wrong with taking pride in a job well done, feeling good when you achieve a milestone, or reveling in the affirmation of others when it’s rightly deserved and received. God placed within us a desire to pursue excellence and impact and accomplishment. So how can you know when you’ve made it an idol?

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**Optional Activity:** Advise each person below how they can enjoy their God-given desires in a way that draws them near to God rather than pulling them away from him.

- Mike wants to do his best at work.
- Jane wants her home to be full of beautiful things.
- Sarah wants to be healthy and in good shape.
- Stanley wants to find a woman to marry.

Look at verse 17. The problem with pleasure, possessions, and pride isn't so much that they are wrong; it's that they're not enough. They don't last, for one thing. Pleasure is fleeting. Possessions lose value. And earthly accomplishments are soon forgotten or surpassed. They don't last.

For another thing, they're too shallow. They cannot satisfy the deepest desires of our hearts. You see, it's not just pleasure we're looking for; it's joy. We don't need more stuff; we need contentment. It's not achievement we're after; it's significance. And these things can only be found, ultimately and eternally, in relationship with God, which is why John says, "The one who does the will of God lives forever."

## Part 3 Apply Your Findings

According to C. S. Lewis, these desires—to do, to have, to be—are merely the rumblings of a much deeper desire. It's a desire so deep, so profound, even Lewis couldn't find a word for it. He talks about it in his writings, this inconsolable longing for something more. Sometimes he describes it as beauty, other times as joy, but by his own admission, none of those words quite gets at it.

The closest word he could find was the German word *sehnsucht*. It's hard to define, but we know it when we feel it. *Sehnsucht* combines the ideas of wanting something and missing something. It describes a deep existential yearning for something that we can't name but know to be true. In his book *The Weight of Glory*, Lewis describes it as "the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never visited."

It's the longing for every good and perfect thing all at once. It's the longing for God and his kingdom. And until that deepest of all desires is satisfied, nothing else will ever be enough. No earthly pleasure or possession or achievement can ever satisfy the deep longing of our souls. "The human heart was made for God," Augustine said, "and our hearts are restless till we find rest in him."

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But once that desire is satisfied, once we have turned to God and aligned ourselves with his good and eternal purpose for our lives, we can experience earthly things as they were meant to be experienced—in relationship with him.

So John's message for us this week is this: You know you're living deep when you want life with God more than anything this world has to offer.

#### Action Points:

- **Discuss which of the three worldly desires has the most pull on your life. Then pray that God will help you resist that pull and fill you with a desire for him, the only one who can truly satisfy your deepest desires.**
- **Carry a journal with you over the next week, noting when you feel pulled to meet one of these three worldly desires. Note what you were doing when it happened. After a week, take a look back to see what patterns may be present.**

—Study by Bryan Wilkerson, with JoHannah Reardon



## Deep Truth

Leader's Guide

### Leader's Guide

# Deep Truth



*Jesus came to rescue and redeem his creation.*

*Most of us come to realize that what we claim to believe about Jesus has implications for our friends who hold different beliefs. In a world where so many people have such different views, how could it be possible that one view is greater than any others? Is there really only one way—one path—that leads to God? Is believing in God enough? Does what we believe about Jesus make that much of a difference?*

*Our understanding of Jesus is critical to our relationship with God. And these are some of the questions that are addressed in the portion of John's letter that we come to today.*

Scripture: 1 John 2:22; 4:1–3; 4:9–10

Based On: The sermon series "Living Deep" by Bryan Wilkerson

# Deep Truth

## Leader's Guide

### Part 1 Identify the Issue

**Note to Leader:** *Provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

From the first chapter, John connects a deeper life with Jesus and suggests three tests that anyone can apply to his or her own life to determine whether or not he or she is really living deeply.

The first test is the ethical test, and for the last few weeks we've been drilling down on this question: How do you live? Do you have a deep walk—a walk of obedience?

The second test is a relational test: How do you love?

The third test is a doctrinal test: What do you believe? This is the test of our passages today, and what we will discover is that to live the deep life is to be rooted and grounded in deep truth. Deep truth has everything to do with our understanding of who Jesus is.

At the time that John wrote this letter, there was a crisis in the church. There were those who were leading people away from what Jesus taught about himself, and the nature of their false teaching is found in these verses: “Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ” (1 John 2:22); “Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God” (1 John 4:2–3).

These teachers were denying that Jesus was God in the flesh, as he claimed to be. There was a certain brand of teaching at this time that argued that Jesus was really just a person who at the time of his baptism became inhabited by the Spirit of God, but God's Spirit left him before the crucifixion. They believed that for God to connect himself with the material world, human beings, and suffering would somehow diminish his nature—that coming down to earth as a human was beyond his station.

John's reply to this false teaching is clear, definitive, and filled with conviction! To abandon Jesus' claims of divinity is to let go of the possibility of living the life that God has for you. The Incarnation is the deep truth that John urges his followers to keep at the very center of their faith and at the core of their lives.

#### Discussion Questions:

**[Q]** In a few sentences, tell us who you believe Jesus to be.

**[Q]** Many of us know Muslims, Hindus, atheists, and agnostics. What are we to do with such a particular view of Jesus in this environment? How do we continue to hold such a view when it puts us at odds with other views held by people around us?

## Deep Truth

### Leader's Guide

**[Q]** If believing that God became a man isn't a selfish, exclusive claim intended to put people off, what is it?

## Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching Point One: Through Jesus, God shows us who he is.

Many people believe that God is distant and aloof, that he's too busy, like a father whose thoughts are so preoccupied with the important things he's doing that he brushes past his kids who are starving to know him.

This is why Jesus came to earth—why God sent himself to dwell among us. In Jesus' life recorded for us in the Gospels, we have the unbelievable opportunity to see what God is really like! Through Jesus' words we learn what God would say to us. Through his actions we can see what was most important to him. By his loving relationships, we can know his heart for people. In Christ, we see a God who is full of love and compassion, who is ready to forgive and embrace, who is ready to humble himself and stoop down to let us know who he is. In the person of Jesus, God speaks directly, acts visibly, and shows publicly just how he feels about humanity.

N. T. Wright puts it perfectly: "Jesus provides exegesis of God. Dare to shape your vision of God around the person of Jesus."

**[Q]** Read what Jesus says about himself in John 14:9. How does that address what we are talking about?

**[Q]** Read 1 John 2:22. Why do you think John uses such strong language here?

- Why is denying Jesus really denying the Father as well as the Son?

**[Q]** Read 1 John 4:1–3. How have you seen this test work for you in determining truth from a lie?

### Teaching Point Two: Through Jesus, God invites us to be with him.

There is a problem with our ability to relate to God. The problem is that God is just. That's not a problem, per se, because we want a God who hungers for justice. When we hear of a boy living as a slave, we get angry. When we hear about young girls who have been sold into prostitution, our hearts cry for justice. So God's justice is a good thing. The problem is that

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if complete justice prevails, eventually the gavel will fall on us as well. When we're completely honest with ourselves, we know that our selfishness and sinfulness have contributed to the problems of the world. And of course, this is where Jesus comes in again. This is where God in the flesh makes all the difference.

As a man, Jesus was the only person to live a perfect life. And as God, Jesus was the only one who would be qualified to bear the burden of the sin of all humanity—the only one whose sacrifice would be complete and sufficient. At the Cross, God's love and justice kissed each other (Psalm 85:10).

Read 1 John 4:9–10, which sums this up perfectly.

**[Q]** Name practical ways we “live through him” (v. 9). In other words, what does this look like in our lives?

**[Q]** How does the Cross help define what love is (v. 10)?

**[Q]** Read Psalm 85. Why is it so important to understand both God's justice and love?

**Optional Activity:** It's been said that justice is getting what you deserve, mercy is not getting what you deserve, and grace is getting what you don't deserve. Form pairs and tell your partner about a time you experienced justice, mercy, or grace. What happened? What did you deserve? What did you get? How did that impact you?

### Teaching Point Three: Through Jesus, God makes the world right again.

If you do a brief overview of all the religions of the world, you will discover that there are three primary views of the material world. The first view is that the world is an illusion. This view holds that the goal of religious life, enlightenment, or salvation has little or nothing to do with the material world. Rather, the goal is to disregard the physical realm altogether, getting in touch, instead, with the “spiritual.” For some, this means that the consequences of our physical actions are meaningless, so we're free to do whatever we want in our flesh; in the end it doesn't matter.

A second view is that the material world is bad. This view holds that the goal of religious life is to withdraw from the world, because there is no hope to be found there. The physical world is on its way to destruction, and to be entangled by the things of life in this world is to become tainted by its evil.

The third way to view the material world is John's view of Jesus—a Jesus who fully enters into a real physical existence. This view holds that the material world is good; it was created to be

## Deep Truth

### Leader's Guide

a place where God's glory is put on display. The beauty and joy and rich relationships that are possible indicate the goodness of the one who created it. With salvation comes a deep appreciation, affirmation, and engagement with the world in ways that align with its intended purposes.

Despite how much beauty, goodness, and truth the world contains, we recognize that something is wrong with creation. Accidents happen. Sickness threatens our lives. Violence and oppression cause people to be displaced and even worse. There's the toil of hard labor and the frustration of limited resources. Natural disasters strike us and leave us lacking food, water, and shelter.

**[Q]** Jesus did not live like the physical world is an illusion. Give some examples.

**Leader's Note:** *He takes broken things and begins fixing them. He heals, feeds, restores.*

**[Q]** How does the restoration of the human heart through the forgiveness of sin have implications for the physical world as well?

## Part 3 Apply Your Findings

What do we do when our friends challenge our belief about who Jesus is, especially when we understand more fully the rescue he provides, not just for us, but for all of humanity and for the world? We find ways to make him known more clearly. We describe more carefully and clearly why he has become so dear to us. We let our love and goodness gain us a voice, and we give testimony through our lives and our words about who he is and what he's done. We learn from Christ who it is that he wants us to be, and we live genuinely in him. We let him lead us to become a part of the solution of a broken world. We faithfully testify that Jesus is the Christ—God made flesh: our greatest hope, and the greatest hope for all the world.

### Action Points:

- **Share with the group one person you would love to better understand who Jesus is. Pray for that person and for ways to demonstrate who Christ is to them by your words and deeds.**
- **How can you show love and goodness on a daily basis with the hopes of gaining a voice in the world? What new thing might you do? What might you stop doing? Discuss your answers in your group.**

—Study by Tom VanAntwerp, with JoHannah Reardon

## Deep Hope

Leader's Guide

### Leader's Guide

# Deep Hope



*We are being formed into the likeness of Christ.*

*As we dig deeper into this letter called 1 John, we are going to consider the kind of person we all want to be. Last week we considered the doctrinal test of our faith and discovered Deep Truth—that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man and is the only way to eternal life. This week we'll return to the ethical dimension of our faith and discover deep hope.*

Scripture: 1 John 2:28–3:2

Based On: The sermon series "Living Deep" by Bryan Wilkerson

## Deep Hope

### Leader's Guide

## Part 1 Identify the Issue

**Note to Leader:** *Provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

We never stop longing to be better people, do we? There's always some aspect of our behavior or personality that we wish we could change. And what's true for people in general—this desire to become a better person—takes on special meaning for people who call themselves Christians. We not only want to become better people, but we want to become Christ-like people. How does that happen? These are questions we all struggle with, no matter how old we are or how long we have been following Christ.

### Discussion Questions:

**[Q]** If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

**[Q]** Do you feel like that kind of change is possible? Why or why not?

**[Q]** Is it realistic for people like you and me to imagine becoming “like Christ” someday? Explain.

## Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching Point One: Jesus Christ will return to earth again.

Read 1 John 2:28–29.

John introduces two new ideas in this section of his letter. The first new idea he introduces is the Second Coming of Christ (v. 28). In this one verse, John uses two distinctive New Testament words to describe the Second Coming of Christ. The first is the word *appears*. It's the same word he used back in chapter 1 (see 1 John 1:1). This particular word describes the invisible becoming visible—something hidden being revealed.

**[Q]** Throughout the Old Testament period, God was there but could not be seen. He was hidden, so to speak, behind a pillar of fire or smoke on a mountain. But in Jesus of Nazareth, the invisible God became visible. But then he disappeared and returned to heaven. How will it be different when Christ returns to earth again?

The second word John uses is the word *coming*. This word was used to describe a king riding into one of his territories to be welcomed and honored by his subjects. Remember that in the ancient world there was no CNN broadcasting images of the king on the nightly news, no

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### Leader's Guide

photographs to look at, no YouTube videos of his latest speech. Most people would live their whole lives without ever actually seeing their king. So a king visiting one of his cities was a rare and glorious event. People would line the streets—“There he is! That’s him!” Sometimes they would go out to meet him, to join his entourage, and accompany him into the city.

**[Q]** That idea raises an interesting possibility about the so-called “rapture” of the church. When Paul describes the church being caught up to meet the Lord in the air, is he describing the rapture of the church to heaven? Or is he describing the church meeting Christ to accompany him on his triumphant return to earth? What do you think?

### Teaching Point Two: When he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

John’s description of the Second Coming is positive and inspiring. He wants us to look forward to that day “confident and unashamed.” And in 3:3 he describes it as our “hope.” Many of us were taught that the Second Coming was a source of fear, not hope.

Sermons on the Book of Revelation have often included scary-looking charts and even scarier terms like *tribulation* and *Armageddon* and the *mark of the beast*. The Second Coming was supposed to be a good thing, but it inspired more fear than hope.

**[Q]** How do you feel about the Second Coming? Does it fill you with hope or with fear? Explain.

**[Q]** Why can we be confident and unashamed?

Look at verse 1 John 2:29. With this verse John introduces his second new idea to this letter: the “second birth.” Up until now he has described a relationship with God in terms of fellowship and belief. Now he uses the language of birth and family. Once again, this isn’t a new idea for John. It’s central to his gospel (John 3).

**[Q]** Read 1 John 3:1. Why do you think this fact brings John such wonder after all these years?

**[Q]** Picture a military family standing on the tarmac, waiting for their father or mother to step off a troop transport, home from war. How does this mental picture help you better understand the Second Coming?

**Optional Activity:** Find a video online of a parent coming home from active military duty, surprising or greeting their children. After you’ve watched it, discuss the similarities between that and the Second Coming.



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### Leader's Guide

**[Q]** John says, “If you are a child of God . . .” That’s a big “if.” How does that show how the Second Coming can be a scary proposition?

### Teaching Point Three: We will become like him.

Read 1 John 3:1–3.

As he’s writing, an even more wonderful thought comes to John’s mind, under the inspiration of the Spirit. When Christ returns, we’ll not only see him, we’ll be like him! Look at verse 2. You see, when you’re someone’s child, you don’t just belong to them; you resemble them. You can’t help it. You carry their DNA.

But it’s not just the DNA that gets passed along. The values and habits and passions of the family get passed along, too. So if your last name is Manning, you probably play football. If your name is Kennedy, you know politics. If your name is Clooney, it’s no surprise you’re in show business. And if your name is Christian, you’re destined to be like Christ. It’s in the genes. It’s who you are.

Look back at 2:29. John uses the language of being born—of parents imparting life to a child. Not just life, but likeness—the family traits. If we’ve been born of God, we have the “righteous” gene. We’ve inherited this propensity, this capacity, for doing good.

Unfortunately, we still have that old nature with us, too—the one we inherited from our natural parents and from Adam and Eve. It’s a struggle sometimes to live by the new nature rather than the old one. But the fact remains that we are now God’s children; we have his life, his nature, at work within us. So becoming like Christ isn’t just a possibility, it’s a promise.

**[Q]** Look again at verse 2. What do you think this means?

**[Q]** How does this verse help us understand why it’s so hard for us to be like Christ?

**Leader’s Note:** *This is in part because of that old sin nature. But it’s also because now we see him “through a glass, darkly,” to borrow Paul’s language. We can’t always see clearly what Jesus would say or do in a given situation. We can’t hear him over the noise of our world or the promptings of our sin nature. Sometimes we lose sight of him completely. But someday we will see him face to face, in all his glory. And then we will be like him. We will become the people we long to be, the people we were born to be, when we were born of God. And that gives us hope.*

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**[Q]** Look at verse 3. How does the hope of Christ's coming not only encourage us to hang in there, but actually change us, shaping us into who we will be?

**[Q]** So, how does transformation happen?

**Leader's Note:** *It's certainly not automatic. You have to act towards it. But it's not a matter of gritting your teeth and trying harder, either. It's a matter of spending as much time with Christ as possible. Spiritual formation isn't a matter of trying harder. It's a matter of getting closer. It's a matter of relating to Christ as much as possible—spending time with him each day, talking to him as you make your way through your day, worshiping him each Sunday, hanging out with his people, and joining him in his work in the world. Because the more we're with him, the more we're open to the work he wants to do in our lives.*

**[Q]** So how does the Second Coming give us hope?

**[Q]** How can that hope carry you through dry times and difficult seasons and disappointment with ourselves and one another?

**Optional Activity:** Give everyone an index card. Ask them to write their name and three words that describe who they would most like to be. Gather them and pass them out randomly. Ask each person to pray for the person on their card, that they will become who they want to be in Christ.

## Part 3 Apply Your Findings

The hope of the Second Coming means it's never too late to change, to grow. It means that day by day you are becoming the person you long to be, the person you were born to be when you put your faith in Christ, and the person you one day will be when you see Christ face to face.

**Action Point:** *On your own this week, look up as many verses as you can find on the Second Coming (use a concordance or a tool like [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com)). Jot down what you learn and why it encourages you.*

—Study by Bryan Wilkerson, with JoHannah Reardon

## Deep Love

Leader's Guide

### Leader's Guide

# Deep Love



*We show true love through sacrifice.*

*Sooner or later, it had to come around to love. We have been considering tests of true faith—the marks of a real Christian. John has written at length about the ethical test (how we live) and the doctrinal test (what we believe). But if you know anything about John, you know that sooner or later it had to come around to the relational test: who, and how, do you love?*

Scripture: 1 John 2:9–11; 3:16–18; 4:7–21

Based On: The sermon series “Living Deep” by Bryan Wilkerson

## Deep Love

### Leader's Guide

## Part 1 Identify the Issue

**Note to Leader:** *Provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

It was John who quoted Jesus as saying, “By this will all people know you are my disciples, that you love one another.” It’s John who’s been described as “the apostle of love.” In fact, an ancient tradition says that when John was an old man, the elders in Ephesus would carry him into the assembly and sit him down to teach. When they did, John would simply say, “Dear children, let us love one another.”

### Discussion Questions:

- [Q] How would you define love in just one sentence?
- [Q] What kind of person is hardest for you to love?
- [Q] Why is love so crucial to “living deep” as a Christian?

**Optional Activity:** Cut out magazine ads or find a series of ads online that show how the world thinks about love (romantic, sacrificial, familial, friendship). Show each ad one at a time and ask the group to describe how the creator of each ad would define love. Then discuss how this is different or the same as biblical love.

## Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching Point One: There are schisms in the church.

John structured his letter in a unique way. It’s not in a linear, outline format with sub-points under each main point (Point 1: the ethical test; Point 2: the doctrinal test; Point 3: the relational test). Instead, John lays out his letter in a cyclical fashion, introducing his three themes and then coming back to them again and again, drilling a little deeper each time.

Read 1 John 2:9–11 where he first introduces the subject of love.

It’s a rather abrupt transition, and John uses pretty strong language: love and hate; light and darkness. Apparently, there was a problem in the church at Ephesus. Remember that John is writing as a pastor to the congregations in Ephesus, and it turns out there were some serious relational issues in the church. We don’t know the details, but it appears to have begun as a doctrinal disagreement over the person and work of Christ, but as so often happens, the doctrinal dispute led to other things—infighting, power struggles, factions, etc.

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### Leader's Guide

It's hard to imagine brothers and sisters in Christ hating each other, but it must have been pretty serious for John to use such strong language. And it's disappointing to learn that the church is having problems so soon, even with an apostle pastoring them! It's equally disappointing to realize that 2,000 years later the church is still struggling with unity and lack of love.

**[Q]** If someone were to ask you how we were doing relationally at your church, how would you answer?

**[Q]** How deep is the love in your church? To determine that consider the following:

- Are you satisfied with the levels of intimacy, care, and prayer you experience together?
- Are you able to have hard conversations with each other?
- Do you love each other only when it's convenient, or do you truly make sacrifices for one another?
- Is yours the kind of love the world would stand up and take note of? Why or why not?

### Teaching Point Two: Love is giving of yourself for the good of others, even those with whom you have differences.

People want to know what love is. They want to see it and feel it and experience it. But what exactly is love? John speaks to this question the second time he raises the topic. Read 1 John 3:16–18.

**[Q]** How does John define love?

**[Q]** With that in mind, how can we know if we are truly loving someone else?

**[Q]** How can we love those who are different from us, who disagree with us, and even those who may be actively against us?

**Leader's Note:** *A pastor from Oxford named Vaughn Roberts put it this way: "When you love people who are like you, that's ordinary. When you love people who are unlike you, that's extraordinary. When you love people who dislike you, that's revolutionary." That's the kind of love John is calling us to—the kind of revolutionary love the world is waiting to see.*

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#### Teaching Point Three: God's love and our love for each other cannot be separated.

Why is love so important? We can understand why John makes such a big deal about truth and about righteousness. Certainly a Christian needs to believe the right things and behave the right way. But why is love so essential? Read 1 John 4:7–21.

**[Q]** Verse 7 says that love comes from God. What does that tell us about our ability to love?

**[Q]** Verse 8 doesn't say, "God is loving," as if love is just one of his many attributes and activities. John says, "God is love." Explain the difference.

**Leader's Note:** *His very essence and nature is love. Every other aspect of God—his wisdom, his justice, his mercy, his goodness—is ultimately an expression of love.*

**[Q]** How does verse 10 motivate you to love?

**[Q]** Why is love a witness to the reality of God according to verse 12?

**[Q]** How is love a test of faith (vv. 13–16)?

**[Q]** According to the rest of this passage, why is it impossible to say we love God while acting unloving toward others?

### Part 3 Apply Your Findings

When you disappoint someone who loves you deeply, they love you anyway! So instead of punishing you or rejecting you, they forgive you. They're patient with you. They give you a second chance—and a third, and a fourth, and however many it takes. That's how God has loved us, so that's how we love one another.

When you're loved like this, you're free. You're free to make mistakes. You're free to disagree. You're free to take a risk. You're free to be yourself. That's why love is the greatest gift we can give to one another: it gives us the freedom to become the people we long to be and are meant to be in Christ.

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**Action Point:** Love is very practical, according to John. It's not just words; it's action. It's giving of ourselves every day. It's doing good for people in ordinary ways. James Bryan Smith wrote a book called *The Good and Beautiful Community*. In one of his chapters, he offers some simple suggestions for living unselfishly. Consider how to implement these this week:

- At home, ask your spouse or roommate how they're doing, and really listen. Even if you have other things to do, practice putting his or her needs ahead of yours.
- If you have children, give them the honor of choosing how to spend one evening this week, any way they want.
- At work, stop by a coworker's desk and ask, "What are you working on today that I might be able to help with?"
- Make some fresh coffee for the office, or clean up the break room.
- At church, sit near the front of the sanctuary or in the spaces where people seldom sit, leaving the more desirable seats for others.
- When driving, be on the lookout for opportunities to let people get in front of you.

—Study by Bryan Wilkerson, with JoHannah Reardon

## Deep Certainty

Leader's Guide

### Leader's Guide

# Deep Certainty

*To know Jesus is to confidently know eternal life.*

*This is the final installment in our look at John's letter—a letter that was written a long time ago to the church in Ephesus, but we've been finding that it speaks quite powerfully to our own lives and churches here in the 21st century. It's a compelling letter, strikingly simple, but it raises all kinds of questions, such as the topic of confidence as we look toward the future.*

Scripture: 1 John 5:11–20

Based On: The sermon series "Living Deep" by Bryan Wilkerson





# Deep Certainty

Leader's Guide

## Part 1 Identify the Issue

**Note to Leader:** *Provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

Christians have all sorts of concerns. Not only do they worry about the same things that non-Christians worry about, but they also have added anxieties about their faith and how society at large relates to their faith.

Let's remember the situation that John's original readers were in. The world was now under the thumb of a pagan empire. Jews had been scattered among the nations, and the fledgling Christian church was misunderstood and persecuted. Most of the apostles had been martyred for their faith, and there were only a few remaining eyewitnesses to the life and death of Jesus.

And now, false teachers had infiltrated the church, and were calling into question the central tenets of their faith. Jesus didn't really have a body, they said, he just appeared to. Faith isn't what matters, they said, enlightenment is—secret truths and mystical experiences. No one can be sure of their standing before God, they said; divine reality is far too mysterious for that. Many believers were beginning to doubt their faith. They were wondering if it was really true, if they really were Christians, and if they could count on anything as the world seemed to be falling apart around them.

And 2,000 years later, we are prone to the very same doubts. There's not a believer here who hasn't questioned his or her faith at some point. Maybe you made a commitment to Christ some time ago, but it seems to have little meaning to you anymore. Maybe you've been struggling with sin in your life, and you're wondering how you could be a real Christian and still think or do some of those things. It could be you've read a book recently or heard a speaker or took a class that has caused you to question your faith on an intellectual level. You look at other Christians, and they seem to have such passion and joy and power, and you wonder what's wrong with your faith. Is it real? Are you really saved? While Christians have always struggled with doubt, in our post-modern, 21st century world, it seems harder than ever to be sure of anything.

### Discussion Questions:

**[Q]** How do you feel about the future? Are you hopeful or fearful, expectant or nervous?

**[Q]** What kind of world do you imagine your children and grandchildren will grow up in? How do you picture it?

**[Q]** What do you count on to give you any kind of confidence as you look to the future?

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### Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

#### Teaching Point One: John's words offer us certainty.

Read 1 John 5:11–20.

Look again at verse 13. That word *know* is very important to John. It appears more often in this chapter than in almost any other chapter in the New Testament. There are actually two words for *know* in the original language. In this verse, and most of the time in this chapter, he uses the word that describes the state of knowing rather than the process of knowing. When I say, “I know I’m an American,” I’m declaring something I know to be true beyond a shadow of a doubt. When I say, “I know what it means to be an American,” that’s a knowledge I am still acquiring and growing into. One kind of knowing is complete and factual; the other is progressive and experiential. While both kinds of knowing are true of a Christian, it’s the first kind of knowing, the certain kind of knowing, that John is emphasizing here.

**[Q]** Looking at this passage, what are three things John wants us to know beyond a shadow of a doubt?

**Leader's Note:** *The first thing he wants us to know is that eternal life is possible. That expression eternal life literally means “the life of the ages.” In other words, a life for this age and the age to come. The word eternal speaks to both the quantity and quality of life. Eternal life is longer, in that it goes on forever. But it is also deeper, in that it encompasses the full range of human potential. Eternal life is real life—the life we were created to live and long to live. In fact, in the original language of verse 12, John doesn’t just refer to it as “life,” but as “the life”—“whoever has the Son has the life”—suggesting that any other kind of life falls short.*

*So the first thing John wants us to know is that eternal life is possible. The second thing he wants us to know is that this life is found in Jesus Christ. It’s not something we find deep down inside ourselves, even though we were created with the capacity for it. It’s not something we find out there in the world, even though this world was designed with that life in mind. Jesus Christ brought this life to us when he came to this earth and lived it for us. He showed us what it means to live life to the full—in relationship with God and for the good of others. The world had never truly seen life as it was meant to be until Jesus came and lived it among us. So logically, the only place to find real life is in the One who actually lived it—Jesus Christ.*

*The third thing John wants us to know is that if you have the Son, you have the life. That’s an interesting way to put it: having the Son and*

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*having the life. We know what it means to have an object, but how do you have a person? To have a person is to be in some kind of relationship with that person. When we say, "I have a spouse" or "I have a friend," we're declaring a certain kind of relationship. But it makes no sense to say "I have a stranger," because there is no relationship there; there's no definition. So to have Jesus Christ is to be in a relationship with him—a relationship defined by belief and trust and obedience.*

**[Q]** Do you *know* you have eternal life, or *hope* you have eternal life?

**[Q]** What difference would knowing make in the way you live your life?

**Optional Activity:** Read each of the following case studies that reflect the hopes of each of these people. After each one, discuss what difference knowing instead of merely hoping would make in each situation.

- Unbeknownst to Jackie, John is going to propose publicly at a professional basketball game.
- Rebecca is going to apply for a management position at work.
- Jennifer and Mark are going to try to have a baby this year.
- Forrest is planning on running his first marathon.

### Teaching Point Two: Believing and following Christ daily lead to complete confidence that you are God's child.

John wrote this letter for a very different purpose and audience than he had in mind when he wrote his gospel. If you go back to John's gospel, as he comes to the end in chapter 20, he tells us why and for whom he wrote: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

You see the difference? John wrote his gospel for seekers, so that they would come to *believe*. He wrote his letter for believers, so they would come to *know*. The letter picks up where the gospel leaves off. In fact, when you put John's gospel and his letter back to back, you discover that John has mapped out the journey of faith.

According to John, the spiritual journey begins with hearing; understanding the life and message of Jesus. The next step is believing; putting your trust in the life and message of Jesus. These first two steps, or phases, are the purpose of his gospel. The next step in the journey, according to John, is living—not just trusting Christ, but actually following Christ in everyday life. That's what he's been writing about in this letter—walking in the truth, doing what's right, loving one another.

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**[Q]** How does believing in and following Christ lead to complete confidence that you are God's child, now and forever?

**[Q]** How does living like a child of God help you know you are indeed a child of God?

- What limitations are there in that approach?

### Teaching Point Three: We need to be aware of the evil one.

It turns out there's one more thing John wants us to know. He doesn't want us to be under any delusions about the kind of world we live in. Look again at verse 19.

We live in a fallen world. Satan is on the loose. People do foolish and terrible things. The forces of nature run amuck sometimes. God never promises freedom from pain, hardship, or disappointment in this life, even for his children. It's important to know that, because then you no longer expect this world to deliver ultimate peace, joy, and love.

**[Q]** How does verse 20 give balance and perspective to verse 19?

- How does that help us in our fears of the future? Can you give a specific example?

**Leader's Note:** *Eternal life isn't waiting for us in the hereafter; it's here now, in Jesus Christ. And when we know, for certain, that we have eternal life, we can deal with whatever this life throws in our path. None of us knows what the future holds for us, for our children, and certainly not for our grandchildren. What we do know, for certain, is that God has given us eternal life and that this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has the life. When you know that, you can face anything.*

**[Q]** What kinds of hardships would John's original audience have had to face?

- Does knowing that give you confidence as you face your own trials in life? Why or why not?

## Part 3 Apply Your Findings

So the spiritual journey John mapped out for us includes hearing, believing, living, and knowing. Where would you put yourself on that road map? Maybe you're still in the hearing stage, still investigating the life and teachings of Jesus. That's okay; you're on your way. Maybe you have come to believe the message of Jesus sometime recently or in the past. That's good;

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that's an important step. That's when you're born again and become a child of God. But you don't want to get stuck there, merely believing. That's no fun at all. You want to start living your faith, growing in your knowledge, becoming like Christ, giving of yourself to others in love. Because once you start living your faith, you suddenly find yourself in the knowing stage, where you no longer worry and wonder, but instead step out in confidence every day, knowing who you are, why you're here, and where you're going.

**Action Point:** Where would you put yourself on the roadmap of hearing, believing, living, and knowing? Discuss in your group and talk through ways to move to the next stage.

—Study by Bryan Wilkerson, with JoHannah Reardon